

SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA

Rumours of strange movements in Rome and in the Sacred College had doubtless already reached Catherine from Raimondo, who represented Pedro de Luna as the chief factor in the election of Urban VI. Since the death of Pierre d'Estaing, the Cardinal of Aragon had become Catherine's chief hope among the great prelates of the Curia. To him the Saint now wrote, "with desire of seeing you a sweet lover of the truth which sets us free," giving him a pitiful picture of the spiritual state of Florence under the violated interdict; where "the religious and secular clergy, and especially the mendicant friars, who have been put by the sweet Spouse of Christ to announce and proclaim the truth, forget that truth and deny it from the pulpit. Not only have they broken the interdict, but they advise the others to celebrate with a good conscience, and the laity to attend, and they say that whoso does not do this commits a sin. They have plunged the people into such great heresy that it is pitiful even to think of it, not only to behold it. And they are led to do and speak thus by the servile fear of men and human pleasure, and by the desire of offerings." "I would have you enamoured of the truth, sweet father mine; and, in order that the holy beginning that you made (when, knowing that the Spouse of Christ had need of a good and holy pastor, you exposed yourself fearlessly to everything for this) may come to effect with perseverance, I beseech you to keep close to Christ on earth, and sound this truth continually into his ears; so that he may reform his Spouse in the truth. With a manful heart, bid him reform her with holy and good pastors, in reality and in truth, not only in the sound of words. Let him then, for the love of Christ crucified, with severity and with sweetness, root out vices and plant virtues, according to his power. And may it please him to pacify Italy, so that afterwards, in a goodly company, we may uplift the banner of the Cross, and make a sacrifice of ourselves to God for love of the truth."¹

¹ I follow the text of the Palatine MS. 56, as the printed editions of this letter (Gigh, 25; Tommaseo, 284) are corrupt. Catherine's denunciation of the mendicant friars is interesting, as showing that the Franciscans, or, at least, some of them, took the popular side, even against the Pope.